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Service Learning Bill Heard by Senate Education Committee

JEFFERSON CITY – The Senate Committee on Education heard testimony from state education leaders in favor of Senate Bill 945. The bill, proposed by Senator Michael R. Gibbons (R-Kirkwood), encourages school districts to adopt service learning programs and projects.

“By engaging youth in service-learning, we are teaching them to become well-rounded citizens by applying critical thinking skills they will use far beyond graduation,” said Gibbons.

The bill directs the State Board of Education to assist school districts’ service learning programs at any grade level. Scott Miniea, service learning program director of the Fulton School District and member of the Missouri Service-Learning Advisory Council testified in support of the bill. The National Education Association, Missouri State Teachers Association and the Missouri School Board Association also testified in support of enhancing service learning throughout the state.

“Children in our schools ask, ‘When will I use geometry?’” Miniea said, “But when they build storage boxes for kids at St. Patrick’s Center, then they can understand the need for geometry.”

During the 2003-2004 school year, only 34 of Missouri's public school districts received service-learning grants. Locally developed and operated service-learning programs need minimal support from the state level.

"As the program has expanded, the budget has shrunk," Miniea said. "We are asking the state legislature to pull existing programs together using what we already have in federal funding, and we are looking at ways of expanding through private grants."

Service learning programs are not an addition to curriculum, but rather a way of expanding what students are finding in their textbooks through service projects. Schools with service-learning have reported a more positive school climate and greater connectedness.

"Habits of youth become habits of life and service learning is a good habit to get into," said Miniea.

Sen. Gibbons currently serves as Majority Floor Leader in the Senate.

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